

Remarks/Arguments:

This is a reply to the office action of October 31. All of the claims (20 - 35) stand rejected as obvious over Schwartz et al. (U.S. Patent 5573520) in view of Swanson (U.S. Patent 5743876). Other documents reported in an Information Disclosure Statement were also considered.

We have amended the claims above to better distinguish the present invention from the prior art.

In general, we agree with the examiner's analysis of the prior art. The only point of disagreement is whether it would have been obvious to modify Schwartz et al. in view of Swanson and if so, what the result would have been. Swanson shows a tube which has semi-circumferential slots cut through the tube in an alternating fashion, where the axial spacing between slots progressively changes. Schwartz' Fig. 10 shows a tube having a continuous helical slot. If, as the examiner concluded, it would have been obvious to make Schwartz' continuous helical slot discontinuous, and if one also changed the spacing between the successive discontinuous helical slots to vary the tube's flexibility, one would not have to change the helix angle. The segments would all have the same helix angle, just with differing spacing between segments. Neither Schwartz nor Swanson shows a tube having a helix angle which changes; however, see WO97/25914, top of page 4.

We have amended claim 20 by adding a new limitation, which is supported by Figure 15c and by the substitute specification at paragraph [0036]. None of the references discloses this improvement.

We believe the claims now presented are patentable over the prior art and that this application is now in condition for allowance.

Respectfully submitted,

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